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HOME DEPARTMENT

ORDER

The 7th April, 2017

COMPOSITE ACTION PLAN TO PREVENT WITCH HUNTING

No.12998-HOME-CHR-CASE3-0171/2015/HRPC.—

I. Background and Objective:

The Odisha Prevention of Witch-hunting Act, 2013 came into force on 25th April, 2014. The legislation aims at prohibiting witch-hunting and other similar practices. The penal provisions include offences such as witch-hunting, branding of a woman as a witch and other similar practices which may cause harm or injury to any person including the persons who are involved in such practices such as the witch doctor. There is also a penal provision for repeated offences. Even though, there are stringent punishments enshrined in this Act framed in 2013, instances of witch-hunting have come to the notice of the Government. Lack of awareness, superstition, deep rooted beliefs etc. have been found to be some of the key causes behind this practice.

A 'Composite Action Plan to Prevent Witchcraft' has been developed in consultation with various Departments to take strong measures for curbing the crime and creating awareness among the citizens against such blind belief.

II. Plan of action for preventing Witch Hunting.

The State Government after careful consideration has formulated the following action plan to be implemented by various Departments and authorities to prevent witch hunting practices in the State:

1. Information, Education and Communication:—

- a. Story based lessons for students on evils of witch hunting to be developed and included in the school syllabus in appropriate classes for the year 2017-18. **(Action – School & Mass Education Department)**

- b.** Hoardings, wall paintings, pamphlets, banners containing punitive and educative content to be displayed in witch-hunting prone areas in the entire State. Special focus to be given to the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Ganjam, Rayagada, Sundargarh Districts. **(Action – I&PR Department)**
- c.** The evils of witch-hunting and the punishment enshrined in the Odisha Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act, 2013 to be broadcast periodically in the electronic media and publicized in widely circulated local news papers to create awareness among the citizens. **(Action – I&PR Department)**
- d.** Massive awareness drives should be undertaken through street plays, road shows by NGOs, folk songs, dance troops like Pala, Daskathia, Ghodanacha, Chadhei-Chadheiani nacha. These should preferably be in local/tribal languages in order to reach the tribal communities. **(Action – Culture Department)**
- e.** Health awareness programmes in the witch-hunting prone areas of the State to be undertaken by the Health Workers/ Asha Karmis/ ANM. They should also educate the masses on the damaging consequences of Branding (Chenka) of children prevalent in some of the areas of the State. **(Action – Health & Family Welfare Department)**

2. Training and Sensitisation:—

- a.** Anganwadi workers of the State to be trained about the evils of the witch-hunting and the various preventive measures. They should educate the women folk in the witch-hunting-prone areas. **(Action – W&CD Department)**
- b.** Sensitization of Self Help Groups to create awareness and to educate the communities on the evils of witch-hunting to be undertaken. **(Action PR Department and W & CD Department)**

3. Convergence and Coordination:—

- a.** Selective and effective action can be taken by converging developmental schemes in witch-hunting prone Gram Panchayats, Blocks as identified by the State Crime Branch. **(Action: Rural Development Department)**
- b.** Collectors of all the districts of the State to identify partner NGOs to work for creating awareness among the communities on witch-hunting and its prevention. Credible NGOs working in this field should be awarded every year during the annual District Festival. **(Action – All Collectors)**

4. Action to be taken by the Police:—

- a.** When a police officer receives any credible information or a report that witch-hunt is likely to be committed or there are reasonable grounds to support that a witch hunt has been committed against a woman, he/she will proceed to the spot and will take all suitable measures to prevent the witch-hunt and to provide protection to the victim, if necessary, get her admitted into a recognized settler home (in case the woman-victim has no place for shelter).
- b.** Since the alleged offence is cognizable and non-bailable, the police officer shall register a case and shall act as per law.
- c.** The police officer shall arrest the accused/suspect if in his/her presence, the offence is committed and shall produce him before the competent court of having jurisdiction to try the proceeding within the prescribed time as per law.
- d.** The police officer seizes the offensive materials used for the commission of the offence/are likely to be used for commission of the offence following due procedure of law.
- e.** Whenever any such occurrence or likelihood of occurrence of such an offence is reported/informed to any police officer for an area outside his/her jurisdiction, he/she shall report to his/her officer in-charge who in turn shall immediately inform the officer in-charge of the concerned police station for follow-up action and shall also send the written complaint, if available for necessary action by the concerned officer in-charge.

(Action-DG & IG of police, Odisha Cuttack/ Spl. DGP, Crime, Odisha, Cuttack/ all SP(s)/all DCP(s))

By Order of the Governor

LALIT DAS
Special Secretary to Government